



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Anne Smrcina
Stellwagen Bank NMS
David Hall

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 12, 2007

NOAA'S STELLWAGEN BANK SANCTUARY TO PARTNER WITH LOCAL FISHERMEN TO REMOVE DERELICT FISHING GEAR

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary will partner with fishermen from Scituate, Mass., in a new project to remove derelict fishing gear and other marine debris that threatens marine resources in the sanctuary and commercial fishing operations. In a year-long demonstration project, Captain Frank Mirarchi and mate Dave Haley of the vessel *Barbara L. Peters* will collect this lost gear and bring it to shore for safe disposal.

Derelict fishing gear may present a threat of entanglement to marine mammals, including endangered whales like the North Atlantic right whales and humpback whales that feed in sanctuary waters. In addition, these lost lines, nets and traps can accumulate on the seafloor, where they may snare active fishing gear and threaten safe fishing operations, requiring valuable labor and fishing time to free the working gear.

"This demonstration project, funded by NOAA's Marine Debris Program, shows how the sanctuary and commercial fishermen can work together to improve the environment and reduce threats to the safety of both fishermen and marine life," said Craig MacDonald, Stellwagen Bank sanctuary superintendent. "Proper disposal of derelict gear is not only a cost-effective solution but one that has conservation benefits as well."

During the demonstration project, Mirarchi and Haley will work with sanctuary staff to identify offshore locations where derelict fishing gear has accumulated, retrieve the gear and dispose of it through approved disposal methods. The Scituate harbormaster will help coordinate onshore activities.

Lobsterman Craig Keefe of Scituate will work with Mirarchi and Haley to identify gear conglomerations, retrieve them and haul them back to port for disposal. After collection, the marine debris' location, weight, type of gear and handling time will be recorded. A better understanding of how this gear is lost and where it accumulates may reduce the financial impacts and ecological and safety threats this gear presents to fishermen and wildlife.

"Derelict fishing gear is a big problem in the Gulf of Maine, something all fishermen have to deal with," Mirarchi said. "This project is an important first step and we are willing to take the lead along with the sanctuary because it will remain a serious problem for all of us if nothing is done."

Derelict gear also presents an entrapment threat to other wildlife, including fish and invertebrate species, and can cause harm to maritime heritage resources, such as shipwrecks. Lost gear may also threaten the safety of divers exploring sanctuary shipwrecks and other dive sites.

Information gathered from this project will be posted on the sanctuary's Web site, the Marine Debris Program Web site, and distributed to the NOAA Fisheries Service, the New England Fishery Management Council and to regional fishing organizations.

Designated in 1992, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 842 square miles of ocean, stretching between Cape Ann and Cape Cod. Renowned for its scenic beauty and remarkable productivity, the sanctuary supports a rich diversity of marine life including marine mammals, more than 30 species of seabirds, more than 100 species of fishes, and hundreds of marine invertebrates and plants. Additionally, the sanctuary is an important depository of numerous shipwrecks, including the historic steamship *Portland*.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

- 30 -

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA National Ocean Service: <http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov>

NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

NOAA Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>

NOAA Marine Debris Program: <http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov>